



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **ICE arrests 375 gang members & associates in two-week enforcement action**

***-- Latest actions under Operation Community Shield include 10 arrests in Omaha & Council Bluffs --***

OMAHA, Neb. – Ten members and associates of violent street gangs were arrested in the Omaha-Council Bluffs area and face deportation as a result of a two-week nationwide operation that netted more than 375 in 23 states. The operation was conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents as a joint effort with numerous other law enforcement agencies.

The arrests were the latest under the auspices of “Operation Community Shield,” a comprehensive initiative launched by ICE roughly one year ago to disrupt and dismantle transnational, violent street gangs. In the past year, Operation Community Shield has resulted in the arrest of a total of 2,388 members of 239 different violent street gangs. Fifty-one of those arrested were gang leaders. Approximately 922 of those arrested were from the violent street gang Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13). Those arrested under Operation Community Shield are either prosecuted criminally or removed from the country through immigration proceedings. To date, 533 have been charged criminally, while 1,855 have been hit with administrative immigration charges.

The Omaha ICE office arrested eight members and associates of the violent MS-13 gang, and one member and one associate of the Sureños (SUR-13) gang. Nine were arrested in Omaha and one in Council Bluffs, Iowa. Six are nationals of Mexico and four are nationals of El Salvador, and all are illegal aliens. The Omaha ICE office has arrested a total of 48 gang members and associates since Operation Community Shield began.

In the latest enforcement action that began Feb. 24, 2006, ICE agents across the country teamed up with its law enforcement partners to arrest large numbers of gang members in Dallas (44), San Diego (41), Washington, D.C. (22), Miami (22), and Raleigh, N.C. (19). Gang members were also arrested in locations such as Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Des Moines, Iowa; and Springfield, Mo.

Those arrested in this latest operation included MS-13, as well as Sureños, 18<sup>th</sup> Street Gang, Latin Kings, Vatos Locos, Bloods, Crips, Armenian Power, Street Thug Criminals, Brown Pride, Asian Dragon Family, Big Time Killers, Avenue Assassins, Spanish Gangster Disciples and Hermanos Pistoleros Latinos.

More than 260 of the 375 individuals arrested in the two-week operation have past criminal records, most of them violent. Six of those arrested were gang leaders. ICE agents arrested 73 of the individuals on new criminal charges that range from drug violations, to firearms violations, to charges of re-entering the country after deportation. The remaining individuals are charged with administrative immigration violations and have been placed into deportation proceedings.

Among those arrested in the Omaha-Council Bluffs area over the past two weeks are:

- Melvin Alvarez, 25, a national of El Salvador and an MS-13 gang member. Alvarez had been ordered deported by a federal immigration judge, but had defied the order and become a fugitive.
- Mayra Martinez-Rubio, 31, a national of Mexico and an associate of the Sureños gang. She has convictions for prostitution, burglary and a drug offense.
- Marcos Bravo-Meza, 20, a national of Mexico and a member of the MS-13 gang. He has convictions for theft and possession of burglary tools.

ICE special agents and detention and removal officers were assisted in the arrests by the U.S. Secret Service; the Omaha Police Department Gang Unit; the Council Bluffs Police Department; the Social Security Administration; the FBI; the Bellevue Police Department; Douglas County Probation and Parole; Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF); and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

“This operation is a prime example of how cooperation among local and federal law enforcement authorities can make our communities safer,” said ICE Resident Agent-in-Charge Michael Wardy. “These gang members are off the streets, and ICE will now use its unique law enforcement authority to ultimately remove them from the country.”

### **About Operation Community Shield**

Operation Community Shield was launched in February 2005 after a threat assessment by all ICE field offices identified MS-13 as one of the largest and most violent street gangs in the United States. The assessment found that most of the gang members were foreign-born, in the United States illegally, had prior criminal convictions, and/or were involved in crimes that made them subject to ICE’s broad immigration and customs authorities.

ICE kicked off Operation Community Shield with an enforcement operation that resulted in the arrest of more than 100 members of MS-13. In the months that followed, ICE agents nationwide joined ranks and continued targeting MS-13 members in their jurisdictions. In May 2005, ICE expanded Operation Community Shield to include all criminal street gangs and prison gangs with foreign-born members.

Thus far, ICE agents from 76 field offices, working with law enforcement agencies nationwide, have arrested a total of 2,388 suspected street gang members and associates. These apprehensions include 533 criminal arrests and 1,855 administrative arrests. More than 1,075 of these suspects have violent criminal histories. As part of the operation, ICE agents have also seized more than 117 firearms.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*